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**19 ALLEGED MS-13 GANG MEMBERS INDICTED
ON FEDERAL RACKETEERING CHARGES**

U.S. Attorney Commends Federal, State and Local Law Enforcement Cooperation

GREENBELT, Maryland - United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein announces that a federal grand jury has indicted 19 defendants for conspiracy to participate in a racketeering enterprise known as La Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13. The indictment was returned under seal on August 23, 2005 and was unsealed today upon the arrests of the defendants and the execution of search warrants.

Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales said "The violent activities of MS-13 represent a serious threat to the safety of our communities. We're going to fight violent gangs with the same proven strategies and partnerships that have been successful in our efforts to confront organized criminal enterprises in the past. Our priority is to keep our neighborhoods safe and prevent the senseless tragedies caused by street gang violence."

United States Attorney Rosenstein said, "Federal, state and local law enforcement authorities are united in our commitment to fight gang violence in Maryland. If you join a gang that is in the business of committing violent crimes, you can wind up in federal prison."

Special Agent in Charge Theresa R. Stoop of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives said, "The arrests today are just the tip of the iceberg. We will not allow violent predators to jeopardize our children and invade our neighborhoods. ATF remains committed to our partners and understands that working as one is critical to the continued success of our mission."

Prince George's County Police Chief Melvin High stated, "Citizens have been alarmed by gang activity in Prince George's County and throughout the region. Our joint operation today assures them that we are working closely with the ATF and all of our federal, state and local partners to identify gang members and root them out of our community. We will use every resource at our disposal to get criminals out."

Today's arrests and searches are the result of the ATF's Regional Anti-Gang Enforcement ("RAGE") Task Force working jointly with the Prince George's County Police Department, with assistance from other law enforcement agencies.

The indictment alleges that the defendants were members of a violent gang known as MS-13, with members operating in Prince George's and Montgomery Counties. The indictment charges that MS-13 is an organized crime group that frequently engaged in criminal activity.

The indictment alleges that from at least 2002 to August of 2005, the defendants conspired to commit murder, kidnapping, robbery and obstruction of justice. Specific acts of violence charged in the indictment include six murders and six attempted murders in Maryland, as follows: the April 20, 2003 beating and murder in Langley Park of rival gang member Noel Gudiel; the June 10, 2003 attempted murder of a juvenile member of a rival gang outside of High Point High School in Beltsville; the November 22, 2003 stabbing and death of Eliuth Madrigal in Silver Spring; the November 22, 2003 shooting death of gang member Randy Calderon in Mount Ranier; the May 21, 2004 beating and murder of Ashley Antonio Urias at the Washington National Cemetery in Suitland; the September 17, 2004 attempted murder of a juvenile member of a rival gang outside of a nightclub in Langley Park; the October 25, 2004 kidnapping in Adelphi of two juvenile females, resulting in the murder of one and attempted murder of the other; the March 26, 2005 drive-by shooting in Hyattsville resulting in the death of a juvenile male; the June 8, 2005 attempted murder of a high school student outside his home in Langley Park; and the June 14, 2005 attempted murder of a juvenile member of a rival gang and his friend in Silver Spring.

The following defendants are charged in the indictment:

Israel Ramos Cruz, age 28;
Jose Pena Aguilar, age 23;
Everec Alvarez Chacon, age 28;
Edgar Alberto Ayala, age 28, of Suitland;
Jorge Rigoberto Amador, age 31;
Antonio Roberto Argueta, age 25;
Walter Noel Barahona, age 21, of Hyattsville;
Nelson Bernal, age 24, of Hyattsville;
Jose Hippilito Cruz Diaz, age 26, of Lanham;
Ronaldo Diaz Vasquez, age 24, of Wheaton;
Santos Maximos Garcia, age 28;
James Guillen, age 19, of Hyattsville;
Juan Lopez, age 19, of Riverdale;
Israel Ernesto Palacios, age 28, of Silver Spring;
Franklin Mejia Molina, age 21, of Silver Spring;
Juan Carlos Moreira, age 25;
Omar Antonio Vasquez, age 27;
Oscar Ramos Velasquez, age 20, of Baltimore; and
Henry Zelaya, age 18.

Each defendant faces a maximum sentence of life in prison. Initial appearances are scheduled for this afternoon beginning at 2:00 before U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Jillyn K. Schulze.

An indictment is not a finding of guilt. An individual charged by indictment is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty at some later criminal proceedings.

United States Attorney Rosenstein commended the hundreds of federal and state law enforcement officers who worked together to execute the search and arrest warrants today. Mr. Rosenstein expressed his appreciation for the outstanding cooperation and teamwork of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Prince George's County Police Department, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Montgomery County Police Department, the Howard County Police Department, the Maryland National Capital Park Police, the Maryland State Police and the Fairfax County, Virginia Police Department.

Mr. Rosenstein thanked Prince George's County State's Attorney Glenn F. Ivey, Montgomery County State's Attorney Douglas F. Gansler, and Fairfax County, Virginia, Commonwealth's Attorney Robert F. Horan, Jr., for the assistance that they and their offices provided.

Mr. Rosenstein also praised the work of Assistant U.S. Attorneys Sandra Wilkinson and James M. Trusty, and Prince George's County Assistant State's Attorney Laura J. Gwinn, who are prosecuting the case.